



TOURISM INTELLIGENCE CORNER

LACK OF SEX APPEAL?

Tourism Governance is ironically enough the most important, and simultaneously, the least understood phenomenon in the science and praxis of tourism destinations. Compared to topics such marketing, quality, service, technology and economics, it simply lacks 'sex appeal'. Nonetheless, it holds many stakes in the sustainable development and competitiveness of tourism, and studies indicate that Tourism Governance is the single-most important factor in determining the agility and longevity of tourism destinations (Peterson, 2006).

While it may have eluded scientific scrutiny due to its sensitive nature and political stickiness (Welcome to the Caribbean!), today it has reached the ranks of regional and international discussions in which the creation of an intra- and inter-institutional environment of transparent policies, trust, collaboration, integrity and policy intelligence are at the forefront of debate (ACS, 2007; WTO, 2006).

Although relatively absent from scientific scrutiny (Tinsley, 1979; Jenkins & Henry, 1982; Inskeep, 1988; Richter, 1989; Wilkinson, 1997), it may be argued that national governance systems have become the primary, if not solitary, set of variables that explain successes and failures to the exclusion of other factors (Clancy, 1999). Some contend that the success or failure of tourism destinations is largely a function of administrative actors and political (in)action (Richter, 1989).

MANDATES AND MYTHS

Tourism Governance is often defined as the a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, objectives and strategies, within which decisions are made and implemented (Hall, 1999), with a mandate to, e.g.,:

- Safeguard the sustainable development, growth and competitiveness of the tourism destination;
- Be identifiable as the destination or national entity responsible for coordinating and directing the efforts of the different aspects and interdependent elements of the multiplex tourism system;
- Command the support of all important sectors and all major actors in the tourism system;
- Develop a national tourism platform to support and enable decisions and actions of the different public sector agencies/ departments and private (non-governmental) institutions that directly determine and influence the nature and quality of tourism experience provided to visitors and guests;
- Possess the capital and tools necessary to stimulate, encourage and enable the type and amount of supply and demand development that is required by the tourism system;
- Be independent and flexible to develop innovative strategies that be implemented in a timely manner in response to global, market and environmental conditions;

Tourism Governance is often scribed in the allocation of de-

cision-making rights and responsibilities of tourism stakeholders, and the procedures for making and monitoring strategic decisions. Strategic positions and procedures are thus emphasized for safeguarding integrity and sustainability.

MEANWHILE, IN THE REAL WORLD...

Research and praxis reveal that Tourism Governance is a socio-political process through which power is wielded, policy agendas are shaped, conflicts are resolved, coalitions are built, solutions are shaped, choices are made, and results are rationalized...ex-post that is (Peterson, 2001). The notions of power and politics are thus central to Tourism Governance.

Rather than being a system of command-and-control, focusing on the locus of tourism decision-making authority (e.g., ministry, executive boards, supervisory boards, president, director, unit leaders, etc.), effective Tourism Governance in high-performance tourism destinations is more likely to resemble a nimble network of multiple professionals.

Effective Tourism Governance is less about who is 'vertically' positioned to be in control, and more about the complementary assets and competencies of an (public-private) enterprise, and how it can integrate these, in order to develop the required strategic flexibility for realizing and sustaining tourism value in a volatile and hyper-competitive environment.

The organizing logic of the tourism governance is characterized by a collaborative network structure, where communication is more likely to be lateral, task definitions are more fluid and flexible - related to competencies and skills, rather than being a function of position in the organization -, and where influencing of strategic tourism decisions is based on expertise rather than an individual's (or group's) position in the hierarchy (or clan).

This emerging paradigm for tourism governance is based on a philosophy of competent collaboration, where the need for distinct complementary competencies are recognized and developed, and shared adaptively across functional, organizational, cultural and geographic boundaries, thus creating a dynamic networked tourism enterprise...

Ps. How's that for sex appeal?

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